POLAND

A. School Legislation, Regulations and Guidelines

Documents relating to education fail to provide an official definition of abilities, although there are a number of acts and regulations which mention abilities, aptitudes or potential capacities.

The Act of 7 September 1991 related to the educational system, makes some provision for gifted students by enabling them to pursue individualized learning plans and accelerated completion of school. It also points to the importance of competitions, Olympiads and tournaments as methods for diagnosing students' abilities and stimulating creative thinking. A curriculum in one or more obligatory subjects may be tailored to the abilities, interests and educational capacities of a gifted student. Gifted students may participate in university classes consistent with their abilities. If a student with exceptional abilities in one field cannot meet the requirements for school subjects not covered by individual learning plan, the educational requirements for those subjects may be adjusted to the student's individual capabilities, subject to the educational requirements within the core curriculum. The Act also points to the need to support the development of gifted students and ensure pedagogical and psychological supervision, as well as the need to identify educational needs of gifted students and to offer support in the form of scholarships.

Poland is currently undergoing a transformation of its fundamental structures and social systems, including the education system. An education system reform was initiated in 1998.

The objective of the new school system is to raise the society's education level by promoting secondary and university education, leveling out educational opportunities and fostering the improvement of the quality of education understood as an integral process of upbringing and schooling.

These objectives are being implemented with a view to extending common education up to the age of 16, restructuring compulsory education so that it can offer assistance for fast requalifying to meet the labor market needs, introducing tests and examinations to allow for greater comparability of school certificates, and assigning diagnostic and guidance functions to examinations.

B. Specific Provisions

The documents relating to reform stress the need to satisfy the educational needs of exceptionally gifted students. Exceptionally gifted pupils may pursue individual learning plans and courses of study and receive the assistance of an individual mentor. Moreover, an

experimental form of education has been established – academic gymnasiums which provide a shortened five-year educational program instead of the regular six-year program.

The first Academic Gymnasium (secondary lower and upper) was established in 1998 in Toruń.

Pre-school education is not compulsory. Pre-school education aims to develop in a comprehensive and harmonious manner all aptitudes of children. Children in the nursery school, apart from classes provided for in the curriculum, may receive further education in such areas as the English language, music (rhythm education), chess, and sports. At the pre-school level, children with musical abilities are identified, and are subsequently referred to the 1st level music schools. Children with a high IQ may enter primary schools earlier, after obtaining a positive evaluation of their abilities and school maturity by a psychological and pedagogical counseling centre [ISCED level 0].

At ISCED level 1, pupils with artistic (music, ballet) and sports abilities may pursue education in specialist schools. Children with a high IQ may begin their education earlier (at the age of six), with the option of individual schooling. They may skip one or two grades. The pupils are supervised by individual mentors and take part in various extracurricular activities on the school premises, organized within the framework of interest circles, as well as in other circles, workshops and interest centers outside school run by educational institutions and centers (mathematics, arts, music, biology, sports and other topics, depending on students' educational needs).

Exceptionally gifted students at the primary and secondary level undergo psychological counseling. Mathematically gifted students participate in mathematical competitions, the artistically gifted in contests and exhibition, and students with abilities in music and performing arts in competitions and performances.

After passing final examinations in primary school, pupils continue their mandatory education in gymnasiums (from the age of 13 to 16). Students with exceptional abilities in mathematics and the social science may apply for admission to the Academic Gymnasium in Toruń, which offers two broad fields of study: the humanities and science subjects. The Academic Gymnasium accepts students from all over Poland (the school has boarding facilities). It accepts those students who have achieved excellent results in primary school, high scores during a multi-stage qualification procedure, and who have received a positive evaluation from a psychological and pedagogical counseling centre. Education in the Academic Gymnasium is pursued under individual learning arrangements, correlated with

comprehensive extracurricular classes held in school, and co-operation with university teachers and pupils' participation in classes held at the university.

After completing the gymnasium, students may develop their abilities in general education secondary schools or in profile secondary schools. Education in lyceum lasts from the age

16 to 19. Gifted students continue their education, depending on their abilities and interests, in teacher training or foreign language colleges or at institutions of higher learning (universities, academies, technical universities with courses running for five to six years). Most gifted students complete their education with doctorate studies leading to a Ph.D. degree (four years).

The educational needs of gifted students are provided for at different levels of education at schools catering to field-specific abilities. A large group of such schools is made up of schools of arts, supervised by the Ministry of Culture. There are many arts schools in Poland, the majority of which (ca. 500 schools) are music schools of the 1st and 2nd level.

The 1st level involves basic training running for four or six years. Children between the age of six and nine are accepted for the six-year training cycle, while children between the age of 10 to 16 for the four-year cycle.

The 2nd level is designed for young people and adults. Some music schools also offer teaching in nursery section, which accept children between the ages of three to six. There are also about 50 arts lyceums and nine ballet schools in Poland.

Other schools addressing field-specific abilities include sports schools (primary, secondary and post-secondary) which train children and young people in football, fencing, skiing, sports gymnastics, sports acrobatics, swimming, and rowing. At the secondary level, the development of field-specific abilities is significantly enhanced by a system of national and international competitions and music festivals and subject Olympiads (there are 32 Olympiads) [ICED level 2].

Another very important structure in the education and care of gifted students at the secondary school level [ISCED level 3] is a network of 64 secondary schools associated within the Creative Schools' Association (since 1983) and the Active Schools' Association. The associated schools support one another, introduce educational innovations and create an in-service teacher training system. Gifted young people attending these schools rank high in international subject Olympiads, while in Poland the associated schools rank first in terms of numbers of Olympiad-winning students (in 2002, out of 50 schools achieving successes in international Olympiads, 29 belonged to the CSA).

The development of the abilities of children and young people is supported by the Polish Children's Fund (since 1983). Numerous specialist workshops are organized within this framework, as well as consultations throughout the year, summer camps for children and young people with high abilities in the humanities and science subjects, integrated open-air artistic events for those with artistic and musical abilities, and summer camps for musically

gifted students. The network of non-governmental foundations in Poland is relatively well developed and some of them aim to help gifted people, particularly in areas such as music and the visual arts. One of the more interesting foundations is the Talent Promotion Foundation, established in 1995. The Foundation's objective is to organize performances, shows, exhibition and to grant national and foreign scholarships to young people with exceptional abilities in arts. Funds obtained by the Foundations are earmarked primarily for paying for the education of young people in renowned foreign schools.

C. Identification Criteria

There are many forms of identifying abilities in children and young people. At an early stage of the child's development, the main identification methods are parent nomination and psychological examinations conducted in pedagogical and psychological counseling centers.

In primary and secondary schools, an additional form of the diagnosis is performance in contests and tournaments. Secondary school and university students participate in national and international subject Olympiads, which also serve diagnostic and selective purposes. Olympiad finalists do not take university entrance exams and are accepted to university courses relating the Olympiad subject. There are also numerous national and international musical and artistic contests. At each level of education, psychological counseling centers examine referred students for IQ level and for field-specific abilities. The counseling centre co-operating with the Academic Gymnasium in Toruń also evaluates a student's cognitive style, creative attitudes and abilities, interests, and motivation. Information gathered in the counseling centre supplements the information provided by parents and teachers. The Polish Children's Fund, for example, uses nominations by parents, teachers, peers, third persons and self-nomination. A subsequent stage of the diagnosis involves experts' evaluation of a work-project submitted by gifted children and young people in the area relating to their abilities. Yet another stage involves observations carried out at camps, and a regular assessment of the student's progress in a field relating to his/her abilities.

D. Teacher Training and/or Teacher Upgrading and Networks of Experience

Exchange

There are no special schools offering full-time training in teaching gifted students in Poland. Only at the Special Education Academy in Warsaw can students in the teacher training program choose a specialization in gifted education with computer science, or psycho didactics of creativity.

Prof. W. Limont at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń trains teachers of gifted students and has offered a 300-hour/two-semester postgraduate courses since 1999

(Postgraduate Course Training of Education of the Gifted and Creative Children/Training of Education of the Gifted Children in Rural Areas). Topics such as, philosophy, sociology, psychology, learning techniques, and identification and provisions for the gifted child are discussed during the training. Creativity training is also included.

Five groups have been completed so far; with around 340 teachers from all over Poland

now specialized in gifted education. The course is financed by the Ministry of Education and Sport with teaching grants, awarded each time under national competition arrangements. Individual contributions are low.

Numerous training sessions are organized in Poland for teachers, covering issues relating to giftedness.

Teachers of schools associated with the "Creative Schools' Association" (CSA), "Active School's Association" (ASA) or the "Association of Teachers of Olympiad-winning Students" (ATOS) [ISCED levels 2 & 3] can follow retraining courses at one of the 64 CSA or ASA schools.

Dr. Danuta Nakoneczna has organized intervention and supervision for teachers since 1983 to encourage individual development, student-specific curricula, and to establish an extensive teacher network.

Tutors of gifted students meet once a year to nominate students for the grants of the "Polish Children's Fund" (PCF).

E. Research and Professional Care and Counseling

Several specialist organizations in giftedness and gifted education are available for information and assistance: Ministry of National Education and Sport, Methodical Centre for Psychological and Pedagogical Assistance, Polish Children's Fund, Creative Schools' Association, Active Schools' Association, Association of Teachers of Olympiad-winning Students, Ministry of Culture, Centre for Gifted Children at "University for Parents", Superintendent Office in Bydgoszcz, External Department in Toruń and the "Centre for Psychological and Pedagogical Assistance" in Toruń.

In addition, scientific institutes such as the Nicolaus Copernicus University Torun, Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Warsaw University, and the Kazimierz Wielki Academy in Bydgoszcz offer their expertise to interested parties.

Most of these institutes also run research programs on a variety of topics, such as imaginational techniques, creativity, learning techniques with new media, psychological predispositions of gifted students, intellectual abilities, and the academic career of mathematical gifted students.

F. Priorities and Expectations

The development of provisions for the gifted child began with school initiatives. The first steps involved a system of competitions and Olympiads (1950's and 1960's), which allowed for the identification of gifted students. Teachers and mentors working with students at school also took initiatives. In the late 1970's schools began to introduce innovations and educational experiments relating to the education of students

The first half of 1980's witnessed some private initiatives, such as the establishment of non-governmental structures, the most important being the Polish Children's Fund formed in 1983. Under pressure from people acting in support of gifted children, the issue regarding provisions for the gifted child found its way to the Polish parliament and the first structures were created, providing for the care and education of gifted students. However, dynamic changes in the political system prevented these ideas from being put into operation. It was not until 1991 that legal provisions and regulations concerning the care and education of gifted students were adopted. Since 1998, a reform of the education system has been implemented and which also takes account of the special educational needs of gifted students.

The main obstacles relating to further provisions for the gifted child include:

1. Lack of properly educated teachers of gifted students. There is a possibility for training larger numbers of teachers of gifted students by establishing an appropriate systemwide structure, incorporating university teacher training programs with obligatory modules relating to the education and care of the gifted student, postgraduate courses and a training system at various levels and stages of teacher education. It is also necessary for Polish teachers to be able to participate in courses leading to the ECHA**Diploma**

2. The lack of an established Centre for High Abilities. This obstacle could be overcome within a very short period of time

3. The lack of funds for the implementation of projects related to the removal of the above-mentioned obstacles. The funds in question cannot be obtained in Poland because of the large number of needs in all facets of life which have arisen during the current period of change and transformation. Yet, it would be possible to create appropriate conditions with sufficient support from the EU under joint research and implementation projects.